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SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR'S MEETING WITH MINISTER OF GOVERNMENT

REF: STATE 90800

Classified By: Ambassador Heather Hodges for Reasons 1.4 (b&d)

¶1. (C) Summary: In her first official meeting with Minister of Government and Police Fernando Bustamante on September 2, the Ambassador stressed the concerns and risks posed by Ecuador's visa free policy, and asked the Minister's assistance in ensuring that the counternarcotics letter of agreement (LOA) was signed by the end of September. Bustamante noted the need to modernize the police and that the GOE's intelligence services were being reformed. The discussion was cordial and frank, and Bustamante seemed interested in maintaining a positive working relationship. (End Summary)

¶2. (SBU) Minister Fernando Bustamante compared his two positions in the Correa government, first as Minister of Coordination of Internal and External Security and the last eight months as Minister of Government and Police. He noted that his work in the former ministry involved the coordination of policy and special projects, such as Plan Ecuador, whereas his current position requires the execution of policy. He added that his most important issues involve combating transnational crime and promoting human rights. The Ambassador said that while she had been in Ecuador only three weeks, she has been committed to protecting human rights and addressing trafficking issues throughout her career.

GOE's Policy on Visa Free Migration

¶3. (C) The Ambassador expressed to Minister Bustamante our serious concern about the effects of the GOE's decision not to require visas for tourists of any nationality (Reftel). Bustamante replied that Ecuador maintains a humanitarian view of migration, that the GOE wants to avoid criminalization of migrants, and that President Correa strongly believes in free movement of people within Ecuador and the hemisphere.

¶4. (C) The Ambassador countered that the problem was not with tourists, but rather that numerous migrants were taking advantage of the new policy to use Ecuador as a platform to migrate to other locations, including the U.S. She pointed out that the number of Chinese who entered since June 20 of this year was double that of all of last year, and that these migrants were not going to the Galapagos, rather to Tulcan (along the Colombian border in Carchi province) or other points of departure from the country. The Ambassador stressed that the large increase in non-tourist migration into Ecuador created the potential for serious human rights

abuses, and that smugglers could capitalize on the vulnerability of the migrants. For instance, the GOE policy might attract the Chinese mafia who would take advantage of Chinese nationals and put them into harm's way. The Ambassador noted that the policy could also open the way for trafficking in persons to route vulnerable young women through Ecuador.

15. (C) Minister Bustamante acknowledged the risks, and said that what was needed to effectively deal with this policy was to strengthen and modernize Ecuador's police force. He added that the GOE was working with Israel to create a more effective system to monitor traffic in Ecuadorian waters, requiring that boats (20 tons or greater in size entering or exiting Ecuadorian ports) install a GPS chip that would allow the GOE's security forces to monitor its location, and that the GOE was looking to purchase go-fast boats from Italy. Bustamante also mentioned that the GOE's military was pursuing the purchase of six unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) from the Aerospace Industries LTD of Israel (to be used by the Ecuadorian Coast Guard component of the Ecuadorian Navy in support of its counter drug and counter illicit trafficking missions) and two Leander class frigates from Chile (to replace two older Ecuadorian frigates), that would improve Ecuador's surveillance capacity. These efforts, he explained, would help reduce trafficking of contraband and drugs as well as victimization of migrants. The Ambassador agreed that these initiatives were positive, but emphasized that future investment into the Ecuadorian security forces' ability to monitor illicit activity did not address the immediate migration concerns nor the humanitarian risks.

16. (C) Bustamante mentioned that the GOE could establish a forum to discuss options on how to effectively manage migration flows in Ecuador, clarifying that Ecuador did welcome tourists, investors and even workers. Bustamante added that Latin America, including Ecuador, had a history of Chinese migrants who were illegally trafficked and that the GOE did not want to repeat this problem.

NAS Letter of Agreement (LOA)

17. (C) The Ambassador raised the importance of completing a mutually acceptable text for next fiscal year's counternarcotics letter of agreement to be signed by the end of September. She mentioned that the Embassy understands that the GOE, with the MFA in the lead, has been working on a revised version of the agreement, and stressed the importance of giving the USG sufficient time to review any proposed changes before submitting the text to President Correa for approval. Bustamante agreed that the GOE should provide the USG a copy of its proposed text first, and promised to personally contact the MFA to ensure that this happens as soon as possible.

Intelligence Reform

18. (S/NF) Minister Bustamante stated that the GOE was not content with its relations with certain agencies of the U.S. (implied intelligence). He added that intelligence cooperation with the U.S., as well as the GOE's own intelligence activity, needed to be "on the table," i.e., that civilian authorities needed to know what was going on within their own intelligence structure. The Ambassador confirmed that the Embassy fully supports an open relationship with regard to intelligence cooperation and suggested that briefings would help keep the GOE's civilian authorities informed. Bustamante said that a GOE-appointed commission was completing a study and would propose reforms in the structure of intelligence in Ecuador. He stressed that it would be under civilian control, and that the Ecuadorian National Police would handle internal intelligence, not the military. He added that intelligence had traditionally been handled by the Ecuadorian military, as civilian control had previously been corrupt and therefore incapable of effective intelligence management. The Ambassador stressed the importance of coordination between the military and police in all security matters.

Need to Strengthen Institutions

¶9. (C) Bustamante stated that "governability" was not well understood in Ecuador because it was often misconstrued as totalitarianism, and added that a progressive approach to the rule of law was completely lacking in Ecuador. He explained that the leftists of the country were over-reactionary and considered any law enforcement action to be power exerted by the elites as part of a "class war." Bustamante also mentioned that unlike the U.S. there was no history of Ecuadorians looking to their representatives in congress to serve their constituents, and that instead they expect the executive branch to provide for the people. The Ambassador responded that as institutions were strengthened in Ecuador, concepts such as rule of law and constituency would develop as well.

Comment

¶10. (C) Bustamante was cordial and engaging during the meeting, and seemed genuinely receptive to assisting on the LOA. His willingness to share his perspectives with the Ambassador may bode well for continued dialogue and assistance in resolving security cooperation issues with the Correa government.

Bio Note

¶11. (C) Bustamante mentioned that his parents were diplomats, that he has a sister living in Montreal, and that he was born in New York. He added that he studied in the U.S. (at Harvard University), lived much of his life in Chile, and didn't come back to live in Ecuador until he was over 40 years old.

Hodges